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C O N F I D E N T I A L VATICAN 003917

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: VATICAN PREPARING FOR NOVEMBER BIOTECH CONFERENCE

REF: VAT 3584

CLASSIFIED BY: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES D. BRENT HARDT. REASON: 1.5 (B)
AND (D).

1. (C) FRANK DEWANE, UNDER SECRETARY OF THE VATICAN'S COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE TOLD CHARGE AUGUST 27 THAT THE COUNCIL'S RECENTLY ANNOUNCED BIOTECH CONFERENCE IN NOVEMBER WAS BEGINNING TO TAKE SHAPE. WHILE THE SPECIFICS ARE STILL BEING WORKED OUT, DEWANE SAID THAT THE COUNCIL WAS SEEKING TO ENSURE THAT THE ROSTER OF SPEAKERS WOULD BE WEIGHTED TOWARD BIOTECH ADVOCATES. DEWANE ALSO NOTED THAT AFTER SOME INTERNAL DEBATE, THE COUNCIL WAS NOW LIKELY TO ISSUE A DOCUMENT AFTER THE CONFERENCE -- EITHER A STATEMENT OR A SUMMARY OF CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS. HE EMPHASIZED THAT THIS DOCUMENT WOULD REPRESENT THE POSITION OF THE JUSTICE AND PEACE COUNCIL, BUT WOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED A DEFINITIVE 'PAPAL POSITION.' DEWANE FURTHER NOTED THAT THE CONFERENCE WOULD HAVE A MEDIA COMPONENT AIMED AT DISSEMINATING THE COUNCIL'S VIEW WIDELY, ALTHOUGH THE MEDIA WOULD NOT BE INVITED TO THE CONFERENCE ITSELF.

2. (C) CHARGE WELCOMED THE PROGRESS IN PLANNING FOR THE CONFERENCE AND THE INDICATIONS THAT THE VATICAN WOULD SEEK TO EMPHASIZE PRO-BIOTECH VOICES. AT THE SAME TIME, HE HIGHLIGHTED THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HOLY SEE'S PUTTING OUT A DEFINITIVE VIEW FOR USE BY BISHOPS AND Nuncios WORLDWIDE TO HELP SHAPE OPINION, PARTICULARLY IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD. HE POINTED OUT THAT CATHOLIC BISHOPS IN BRAZIL HAD RECENTLY PUT OUT A STATEMENT OPPOSING BIOTECH FOODS -- A STATEMENT FULL OF THE WORST MISINFORMATION IMAGINABLE, SUCH AS CLAIMS THAT BIOTECH FOODS CAUSE ALLERGIC REACTIONS, COULD WIPE OUT INDIGENOUS CROPS, AND WOULD THREATEN NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES. GIVEN THE RESPECT WITH WHICH THE BISHOPS' VIEWS ARE REGARDED IN MANY COUNTRIES, HE NOTED, IT WAS VITAL THAT THE HOLY SEE ENSURE THAT ITS BISHOPS BASED PUBLIC STATEMENTS ON FACTS ON NOT FEARS. DEWANE ACKNOWLEDGED THE IMPORTANCE OF DOING SO, AND REQUESTED THAT THE EMBASSY PASS ALONG ANY ADDITIONAL POINTS THAT WOULD ASSIST THEM IN PROVIDING CLEAR AND FACTUAL ANSWERS TO SOME OF THESE CLAIMS, WHICH HE SAID THE COUNCIL'S PRESIDENT WOULD USE IN SUBSEQUENT PUBLIC STATEMENTS. CHARGE PROMISED TO PROVIDE A COMPLETE PACKAGE OF INFORMATION, BUILDING ON PREVIOUS INFORMATION PROVIDED TO COUNCIL PRESIDENT ARCHBISHOP RENATO MARTINO.

3. (SBU) COMMENT: WE EXPECT THAT THE LATE-SEPTEMBER VISIT TO POST OF DR. VAL GIDDINGS OF THE BIOTECH INDUSTRY ORGANIZATION (SPONSORED BY IIP) WILL HELP FRAME THE BIOTECH DEBATE PUBLICLY AND WITHIN THE VATICAN IN ADVANCE OF NOVEMBER'S CONFERENCE. GIDDINGS' PLANNED SCHEDULE INCLUDES CONVERSATIONS WITH NUMEROUS MEMBERS OF THE VATICAN COMMUNITY, INCLUDING MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, AS WELL AS PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS AND A PRESENTATION TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS.

HARDT

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